

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH U.S. NAVY CAPT. LISA FRANCHETTI, COMMODORE OF THE HOSPITAL SHIP USNS MERCY, PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP 2010 VIA TELECONFERENCE SUBJECT: PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP 2010 TIME: 4:00 P.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, MAY 20, 2010

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Thank you, ma'am, for participating in a DOD Live Bloggers Roundtable. I just wanted to welcome everyone.

My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

LT. CRAGG: Yes, ma'am. For the bloggers on the line, please remember to clearly speak your name and organization.

And, ma'am, I'm going turn it over to you if you'd like to start with an opening statement. CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Okay.

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Hi. Good morning, Jennifer. This is Commodore Lisa Franchetti. And it's a pleasure to have this opportunity to speak to you here this morning from -- (audio break). We just pulled in yesterday to pick up almost 400 people before we had to do our first mission -- (inaudible).

I think as you know, Pacific Partnership 2010 is the fifth in a series of humanitarian Pacific action missions to the Western Pacific region. These annual deployments provide the opportunity for us to work together with our host nations and our partner nations as well as many other government and non-governmental organizations to provide humanitarian assistance in the area while building -- (inaudible) -- effectively in a time of real natural disaster or other humanitarian crisis.

Each visit is conducted at the invitation of our host nation partners and is designed to support the host nation's efforts and goals for its citizens. I think, as you know, also, the Mercy will be visiting Cambodia, Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. And she'll be joined in Vietnam and Cambodia by the Japanese maritime -- (inaudible) -- ships -- (inaudible).

As also part of the mission, the Blue Ridge will be visited Palau, and my staff will be cross-decking, most likely, to an Australian ship and join the USS Crommelin in Papua New Guinea.

And we've got a lot of partners out here. We have eight partner nations, six host nations and then we have 17 NGOs that will be sending volunteers throughout the mission.

In addition to doing surgery onboard Mercy, every one of the visits we do will provide primary health-care clinics and dental clinics, biomedical equipment, care opportunities, preventive medicine, veterinary care -- which is a new thing this year for most of our countries -- and then subject-matter expert exchanges. We also have flying engineering teams that will arrive ahead of time and work on projects that the host nations selected, and those projects will wrap up when we get there. And we'll put that all under the Pacific Partnership umbrella.

So I think those are the main facts for the mission, and I'll be happy to answer any questions folks have.

LT. CRAGG: Tom, if you could go first with your question, Tom, please go ahead.

Q Sure. Captain, this is Tom Goering. I'm the webmaster for Navy Cyberspace.

My question is more pointed toward the Peace Corps and their efforts in those same areas. Is there any coordination between the Peace Corps and the United States Navy in this? Over. CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Okay. This is for my -- (inaudible.) The question is is there any coordination with the Peace Corps in this.

There's not been any formal coordination with the Peace Corps -- (inaudible) -- on this mission. Our ADVON liaison officer, our advanced team liaison officer in Cambodia is working to get in touch with some representatives there and see if there are any opportunities for engagement.

Q Outstanding.

LT. CRAGG: And now we'll go to Tom Goering.

Now, we'll go to Christopher Albon.

Q Hi. Christopher Albon from Conflict Health.

I was wondering if you could talk about the continuity -- (inaudible) -- for the patients that you treated on board the Mercy.

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: I just want to make sure I heard the question. You wanted to know about the continuity of care for the patients at -- (inaudible)?

Q That's right. Yes.

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Okay. So right now, what is happening is -- (inaudible) -- is that either the local government or local NGOs that are assisting us are going through and screening candidates for surgery. And we will essentially prescreen those folks -- (inaudible) -- doctors prior to their surgery. In fact, that'll be the first day we come on board. The general idea is to -- any surgery that we do has to have the available, necessary aftercare in that country, and then each patient has to have an aftercare program that can be supported by the health system in the local country.

(Inaudible) -- more complicated surgeries, they will be done in a few days so we can administer the hospital care that we would need to do on board so they are to a point where they could go back to their host nation's health system -- (inaudible).

Q Thank you so much.

LT. CRAGG: And now --

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: You're welcome.

LT. CRAGG: -- the caller is John.

Q Commodore, this is John McCandless from the Navy Memorial Blog. I'm wondering if you have a --

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Good morning. Q Good morning. I'm wondering if you have an estimate on a total number of individuals that you will treat during this mission. CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Yes, sir. About how many total number of patients that we'll treat during this mission. I can only tell you the -- (inaudible) -- and guess that ours will be fairly similar in that Pacific Partnership '08 which was Mercy's last mission, she did provide medical, dental and -- (inaudible) -- services to more than 90,000 people and also completed 26 different construction projects.

So we're expecting to see a fairly similar amount. We have comparable mission days in the port we'll be going to this year.

Q Sorry. Just to get that straight. Did you say 9,000 or 90,000? Nine thousand, correct?

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Ninety -- nine-zero-thousand. Q Okay. And, also, I had a little hard time hearing you on the 26 --

Oh, construction projects?

Q Yeah. Okay. Twenty-six construction projects. Thank you.

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Right. So between our engineer flying teams, we also have Seabees on board that will do some of their own projects as

well as our community-service projects. So quite a good opportunity to work with the host nations in some facility improvements.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: All right. David?

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: You're welcome.

LT. CRAGG: David, are you still on the line?

Q Yes, I am. Hi. It's David Axe with warisboring.com.

I wanted to ask about the connectors, how you're taking a large vessel like your hospital ship and connecting it to what are, in many places, underdeveloped ports. Have you made any improvements in shuttling patients back and forth between ship and shore? CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Well, the question is, I believe, it's a large hospital ship and, basically, how are we bringing the cases to and from the ship.

There's a few options really. We have utility boats. We call them "Band-aid One and Two" that can hold up to about 48 people. And we'll use those for patients' transportation as well as we have two helicopters on board. We can use those both to get our medical and dental, basically, primary health-care folks, out into the communities and get to a greater distance as well as bringing some patients on board.

Q Okay. But does that represent any kind of change over previous hospital ship deployments? I mean, I know that the interface is sometimes tricky, and I'm just wondering if there's been any process of refining and learning lessons.

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Oh, yes. There's definitely been a lot of lessons learned about that. In fact, this year, we do have in Vietnam and Cambodia, when we are there with the Japanese ship Kunisaki we'll also be using their utility boats. And in Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea, we'll be working with the Australian landing craft heavies. So my understanding really from the lessons learned is it tends to be a little bit more of a volume issue, and we think that, with these extra assets, that we'll continue to be able to support the volume of folks that need to go to and from Mercy.

Again, we do expect to see roughly 200 surgeries on board. And I think you'll see the bulk of our effort is really out in the Med and -- (inaudible) -- is where we'll expect to see about 500 patients per day out there in each one of the sites. Specifically, we'll have about three sites a day in any given country.

Q Let me just follow up real quickly. How in the world are you going to interface the hospital ship with a heavy landing craft?

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: So while Mercy has a platform that we place down -- I'm trying to describe it pictorially, and I'm sure we could get a photo to send you. It has a large -- a very large -- platform that the

chain lowers down. It's centered off of the port, the very large port door. And that's how we get the patients on board.

And, again, you know, a lot of coordination has been done, really, since last year with all the host nations on getting Mercy, you know, as close as we can based on depth requirements to minimize the transit time for any patient -- (inaudible) -- going ashore.

Q What you're describing is that essentially lighterage?

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: I'm sorry. I didn't understand your question.

Q The platform that you are describing, it sounds like lighterage. Is it lighterage? CAPT. FRANCHETTI: It's more like -- let's see, I'm looking at it right now. It's a giant -- almost like a box. That would be the best way to put it. It sinks down into the water. It has a little ramp that goes down from the ship onto it. And it more like a -- almost like a -- (inaudible) -- barge, you could say. It's a pretty good-sized platform.

Q Okay. Thank you very much.

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: You're welcome.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. We'll go back around one more time.

Tom, do you have another question?

Q No, ma'am, I do not. Thank you, Captain.

LT. CRAGG: Jim? Chuck? John?

Q Yes. Captain, what's the total number of personnel you have on board as far as your doctors, your nurses, your dental and, also, corpsmen and Seabee teams? Just maybe an overall total number. And I'm wondering where you're drawing those folks from.

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Yes, sir. Our total numbers of the ship will fluctuate.

We have three logistics hubs, like we call them. One is here in Guam. We'll have another one in Singapore and then another one in Darwin where folks will be rotating in and out.

The total number of folks on board, including our partner nation's NGOs, will fluctuate anywhere from just under 900 to, I think so our maximum is going to be right around 1,100.

Now, where do the people come from? On the military side of the house, they're coming from all four services. As you would imagine, a good bulk of the folks are from the Navy, but we do have quite a few Air Force and many Army even folks with us. So that's pretty exciting.

They come from all over the U.S. There is a request that goes out for folks to join the mission. In some commands, it's very a competitive process to get to come here. A lot of people like to do this mission, and we're pretty happy about that.

On the partner nation and the NGO side of the house, throughout the course of the mission, we've got 130 folks coming from the partner nations and about 580 volunteers from our 17 different NGOs.

Q Very good. Thank you. CAPT. FRANCHETTI: You're welcome. LT. CRAGG: Chris, do you have another question?

Q Yeah. I was wondering if you could talk briefly about exactly what the Japanese component to the mission is.

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: The Japanese component to the mission, yes. Earlier this year, their prime minister announced that the Japanese would be joining us in the Pacific Partnership in Vietnam and Cambodia; that we will be joined in both of those ports by an Osumi ship which is named the Kunisaki. She has two LSTs and two utility boats.

Additionally, she will be having a medical team made up of approximately 40 people, medical personnel from the Japanese Self Defense Forces, as well as three different Japanese NGOs. So we're very excited about having the opportunity to work together in both Vietnam and Cambodia.

Q Thank you.

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: You're welcome.

LT. CRAGG: David, do you have another question?

Okay. Thank you. We've had some great questions and comments today. As we wrap up today's call, I'd like to ask Captain Franchetti if she has any final comments.

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Thank you, Jennifer. Again, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with everyone this morning.

This -- for me and for everyone out here, really, this is a tremendous and almost, for most of us, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build on relationships that have already been developed and enable us to meet with our host nations. And, hopefully, our primary goal there is to support the host nation's efforts in providing for its citizens.

So all of the projects that we'll be doing have been approved by both the host nation and USAID to ensure continuity of strategy and goals in each one of the countries by both the host nation and the U.S. government.

So we're very happy to be part of this mission. I just can't emphasize enough what a partnership it is. That's why it's call Pacific Partnership. It's really not a purely military mission in any sense of

the word. And we couldn't do the mission without the support of all of our partners.

So, again, we're really looking forward to the mission. From here, we'll head off and go to Vietnam for our first port and then be kind of running non-stop between Vietnam and Cambodia before we head to our liberty port in Singapore later on.

So thank you very much, and hope everyone continues to support us out here. That would be great.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, ma'am. Today's program will be available online at Bloggers Roundtable link on DODlive.mil where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call along with source documents such as their bios, audio file and print transcripts.

Again, thank you, ma'am, and our bloggers and journalists who participated today. This concludes today's event. Feel free to disconnect at this time.

CAPT. FRANCHETTI: Thanks, Jennifer.

END.